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AUTHOR Nigro, Kirk A.
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ABSTRACT

Teacher morale is based on the teacher's self-esteem. Teachers who feel appreciated, important to the realization of organizational goals, professionally and intellectually capable of contributing to organizational outcomes, and accepted as competent by their supervisors have the high self- esteem needed for good morale. To develop confidence in teachers and enhance morale, administrators can (1) stand up for those in subordinate positions and recognize their efforts; (2) hire strong people who will add to the capabilities of the staff; (3) establish and maintain open, efficient, and effective lines of communication; (4) avoid making excessive demands on teachers' time; and (5) be ready to admit mistakes and to forgive a few mistakes by others as well. (PGD)

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DEVELOPING CONFIDENCE AND SELF-MOTIVATION IN TEACHERS: THE ROLE OF THE ADMINISTRATOR

Kirk A. Nigro
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EASTERN New Mexico University

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Educational institutions have received criticism from an assortment of groups and individuals throughout history. Today, the situation is no different; schools in many places are under attack once again. Educators everywhere are being held more accountable than ever before, especially by those who control the purse strings. Thus, within schools there is much soul-searching, self-criticism, and in some places, "house-cleaning" taking place.

As administrators seek to pursue exellence in education, many teachers may develop a sense of paranoia. They may see evidence of job security being threatened. To thwart undue fear and fright, and to provide a healthy psychological atmosphere, it is imperative that administrators make a concerted effort to develop the confidence of teachers and enhance morale. Doing this at a time when finances are scarce and when some teachers believe that every administrator is "head-hunting" will not be easy, but it can be accomplished.

There are various steps that may be taken by administrators to motivate and instill confidence in teachers, even under adverse circumstances. Some of the same methods often have applicability for classroom teachers as well, as teachers seek to establish better phychological "climate" in the classroom. Before examining specifics, it should be noted that much has been written relative to research in morale/motivation of people in complex organizations. There is no need to repeat the research in depth; rather, the intent here is to focus on a few basic, central themes that pervade much of the research.

Starting from the basic premise that essential physiological needs are of

uppermost importance to mankind, we can assume that a regularly employed teacher is assured that these needs are being met. As authorities, particularly Abraham Maslow, have suggested, there is a series of needs, a hierarchy, through which a person "moves" upward as one level of needs after another is met. It is the need for self esteem upon which interest should be focused by those who seek to build favorable morale.

What is this concept we call self esteem? It includes a person's feelings about self, a desire for respect from others and confidence in self. These three components of self esteem are central to the establishment and maintenance of morale. In order for morale to be high, persons employed by the organization (school) must "feel good" about themselves. They need to feel appreciated, important to the realization of organizational goals, professionally and intellectually capable of understanding and contributing to organizational outcomes, and to feel accepted as being competent to work in concert with their immediate supervisors and those higher in rank.

This is not simply theoretical rhetoric. It is the basis for action administrators may take to create an atmosphere conducive to teaching and learning. The following suggestions are offered as practical methods for translating the previously expressed concepts into reality.

I. Stand up for those in subordinate positions. Work for them and aggressively strive for needs they may have. Be prepared to give rewards for superior effort. Equipment, favorable work assignments, written commendations for personnel files, messages to superiors, congratulatory letters and notices of achievement in local newspapers are examples of actions that may be taken to reward a teacher. For students, written or verbal praise, notes of

"good news" to parents and other forms of recognition all may be utilized by both administrators and teachers in building confidence and trust.

When events are progressing well, inform subordinates that their efforts are recognized as being beneficial. False praise though, is extremely unsound. Such a tactic is often quickly exposed as a transparent pretext. It may cause people to doubt even your sincere praise, and question your credibility.

Do not be timid about informing subordinates when you believe they are wrong. If you perceive that their actions are in error, point out your view of what is correct and use every resource at your disposal to lead them in the right direction. Obviously, grudges should not be held, and criticism should be used only as a constructive tool for improvement. When only one person deserves criticism, do not criticize an entire group or department.

Adverse comments, whether professional or personal in nature, should never be made by a supervisor (administrator) to one person about another employee. Any and all evaluative observations and remarks should be made only to the person they pertain to; to speak to others is unprofessional, unethical and demeaning to all concerned. It is absurd to think that all conversations about third persons can be avoided, and even more unreasonable that such exchanges will always consist of only favorable remarks. Be that as it may, in this context, discretion is an important component of candor.

II. Hire "strong" people. Find candidates who possess special skills, especially expertise that enlarges the total capabilities of a staff. Aptitudes of each teacher should serve to complement the total curriculum. Praise is important not only for each individual, but for the group as a

whole. Group praise serves to develop a feeling of confidence among the staff.

The administrator should know the strengths, weaknesses, needs, and in fact, the personality of each subordinate. Research indicates that groups have a personality as well, and this should be recognized, examined and appreciated. Group behavior, leadership within the group (formal and/or informal) and group objectives should be analyzed. Administrators need to be sensitive to the workings of the group.

Being conversant about people's areas of specialization and what they are doing indicates to them genuine interest. Inconsequential as this may appear on the surface, such an indication of interest may foster self-pride in the individual's accomplishments in particular tasks or objectives that the administrator is attempting to encourage and expand upon.

There is need for both formal and informal visitations to classrooms and other work areas. Formal visits are for the purpose of evaluation. Informal visits are particularly useful to enlighten, to inform, and to clarify impressions that the administrator may hold. Additionally, the visit fosters a belief on the part of the teacher in the genuine concern and interest of his or her supervisor.

Regardless of a person's position in the hierarchy of administration, contact with students should be maintained. The student is the client of each educator, not just of the teacher. In schools where morale is generally perceived as high, it is also noted that principals know their students. Such principals are highly visible; they are not only actively involved in the instructional process, but they are also seen in hallways, cafeterias, locker areas and on playgrounds. When administrators remove student contact from their list of priorities, the designation of 'educator' may deservedly, but

unfortunately, be replaced with 'bureaucrat'. If possible, administrators should teach a class for a period, or at the very least, participate in classroom activity from time to time. There are several obvious reasons for doing so, one of the more important of which is to gain empathy for the day-to-day work of the classroom instructor. As idealistic as it may sound, administrators really ought to teach a class every day of the school year; very few do, but those who do so have a better "feel" for the life of the school and for those who work there.

III. Constant effort needs to be devoted to establishing and maintaining communications that are efficient and effective. Included are all messages (written or verbal, formal or informal) whether they are being received or transmitted. Lines of communication must be open and clear in both lateral and vertical directions. It is important to follow up on written communications. For example, after visiting a classroom an administrator may provide written comments to the teacher. However, time should also be provided for the administrator and teacher to discuss the contents of the written communication. This practice permits both parties to explain various perceptions in more detail and often assists in avoiding misunderstandings.

Knowing one's own work thoroughly is a prerequisite to good communications if individuals are to be capable of properly answering questions directed to them. A simple "yes" or "no" is often not sufficient. Being able to explain the "why" of an answer is vital. The justification for a given decision may serve to clarify many future situations.

No one can have all the answers, nor should they profess to. However, there must be a demonstrated willingness to seek out answers, especially by

addressing questions to those higher in the chain of command. It is not uncommon for lower echelon employees to be disconcerted over having to ask a question of those persons at the highest levels. Consequently, it is much easier for middle management persons to function as an intermediary between levels in such situations.

Effective communications includes assisting individuals and/or groups in settling arguments among themselves. Conflicts should not be allowed to "simmer". All dissention should be resolved before the agitation involved becomes disruptive.

The role of communications is both basic and central to enhancing morale. Without good communications, even the most well intentioned administrator will find obfuscation to be an unsettling element.

IV. Be aware of excessive time demands on people. For example, calling a meeting simply for the sake of having a meeting is pointless. Do not detain people beyond their normal working hours unless there is a valid reason for doing so.

Employees should not be kept occupied with "busywork" or forced to engage in time-wasting and unnecessary clerical duties. Teachers are employed to teach, not to serve as clerks.

Paperwork, reports and similar projects should be done outside of normal school hours by supervisors. To do otherwise is to invite the isolation of the administrator from people. Many administrators will view such a concept as idealistic, yet it is obvious that an administrator who is constantly behind closed doors tending to paperwork is not "out in the open" and cannot possibly know what is taking place "out there".

Tasks should be delegated when it is appropriate to do so. However, simply passing work on to others that will only weigh them down and prevent them from performing the duties for which they were originally employed, is inappropriate.

Regardless of the task, if it is of a nature that takes workers away from their primary responsibility, change is needed. Without modifying assignments, frustration--or even outright hostility--may be a natural result. When overburdened employees are eventually able to return to their primary task, so much time may have been lost that the end result is work of inferior quality; in the long run, the employee may begin to substitute substandard work on a fairly regular basis, eventually creating a new performance standard, below earlier levels of production.

V. Upon entering the first or a new administrative position, the individual should acknowledge a lack of experience, without giving undue attention to it. On the other hand, the experienced administrator should not display a "know-it-all" attitude. Both first-year and experienced administrators should be eclectics, willing to listen and learn, implementing suggestions and advice they receive from a broad variety of sources.

Admission of error is not a weakness. When wrong, concede, then proceed in the correct direction without anguish. After any unpleasant circumstance has ended, it should be put in the past, and immediately move on to the next item of business.

Taking one's self too seriously is not an uncommon mistake. When administrators become too impressed with their own position or personal attributes, they may find themselves alone with their feelings.

Remember that no one is right all of the time. Sometimes students are right, sometimes teachers are right, sometimes parents are right and sometimes administrators are right. Focus decisions on the situation, not on the persons involved. Nevertheless, keep in mind that during the course of a school year, teachers are called upon to make literally thousands of decisions, some of which will not be supported by all students and parents. More often than not though, the decision of the teacher will be correct. Administrators need to support teachers when conflicts occur, for example, when an irate parent arrives at school, confidence is generated when teachers know that they have administrative backing and support. If the situation is one in which the teacher is in the wrong, a great deal of tact and diplomacy must be exercised. The teacher needs and deserves "protection", but not to the point of implying to the parent that whatever a teacher does is always "right". The point is, if the teacher is wrong, corrective action should be taken in private, not with the parent present.

After making an unpopular decision--and many of them are--help each side to understand how and why you arrived at your decision.

Last, but far from least, those who supervise the activities of others should guard their own mental health. Supervisors should be happy and content without being complacent. While total control of one's own mental health may not be possible, it can be promoted. Administration by its very nature contains high and low points, but an ongoing, conscious effort to keep things in perspective is extremely valuable. Constant worrying that "everything is going wrong" can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. It takes practice and patience, but supervisors can improve their own mental health with a positive outlook toward their work, their subordinates and their clients.

VI. In summary, these suggestions will not cure all the problems that do exist in schools. Yet, they are a step in the right direction. The worker (teacher or student) who does not feel good about himself or herself, and what they are doing, will be very unlikely to increase their productivity.

These steps are practical applications of theoretical constructs that may actually be put into practice by today's practitioner in the field. They are realistic efforts used by many administrators to enhance morale in their own domain. Great effort is not required; rules and regulations need not be created, modified nor changed; money is not required; nor is research and/or training necessary to implement the various points.

For the administrator who uses these steps, a pleasant "spill-over" effect may take place. When working with people who exhibit high morale, the supervisor may find his or her own work easier. People help one another, tend to become more self-directed and strive for higher personal standards in their work. In time, they rely less on the supervisor and consequently make the already demanding job of school administration a little more pleasant. When everyone works together to improve morale, people recognize the improvement, want it to continue and increase to even higher levels. At this point, when confidence in self and in others is high, and when personnel have become more self-motivated, the entire process may become self perpetuating. That is not to say that those responsible can cease in their efforts, but it does mean that people will work together to maintain harmony.

Only a small amount of time each day is needed to initiate improvement. It is essential that any such efforts remain consistent and must be based upon a genuine concern for others. Any school can be a better place if attention is given to this most important, yet often neglected area of endeavor.